

ROLLINS COLLEGE POLICY

Title: Substantive Change	Type	Key Institutional
No: KI 1002	Approval Date: 8-25-2025	
Responsible Office: VPAA Provost	Reviewed By: VPAA Provost, 8-15-2025; President's Cabinet, 8-25-2025 Approved by: President, 8-25-2025 Notification to Chair, CLA Curriculum Committee; President, Crummer Faculty; Dean of CLA; Dean of Crummer; Dean of Holt; and Policy Committee, 8-25-2025	
Next Review: 2030-2031	Revision No: 4; see Section VII this document for revisioning history.	

I. Purpose/Introduction/Rationale

Rollins College is required to notify and/or seek approval from external accrediting agencies, particularly its primary institutional accreditor, the Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), when considering new programs or degrees (or modifications to existing programs and degrees, including program closure) that fall under U.S. Department of Education (USDoEd) or other Federal regulations. The definitions and procedures provided in this policy ensure that the College meets notification and approval requirements of external accreditors for all programs, services, and locations.

Substantive change is defined as any “significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Substantive change includes high-impact, high-risk changes and changes that can impact the quality of educational programs and services.”¹

Accreditation status may be jeopardized for institutions found non-compliant with SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* or Standard 14.2 *Substantive Change* of the *Principles of Accreditation*. Unreported substantive change may require a review of the institution’s substantive change policy and procedures by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and subjects the institution to monitoring, sanction, or loss of accreditation. Failure to secure approval, if required, of a substantive change involving programs or locations that qualify for Title IV Federal funding, e.g., student financial aid, may place the institution in jeopardy with the USDoEd, including reimbursement of funds received related to an unreported substantive change.

Note: This policy is aligned to the June 2025 revisions of the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* document; changes to SACSCOC policies and procedures could necessitate changes to this policy at any time. Information contained in this policy and its appendices presumes that Rollins College is in good standing with SACSCOC.

II. Definitions

As defined by SACSCOC, substantive change is any “significant modification or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited institution. Substantive change includes high-impact, high-risk changes and practices that affect the quality of educational programs and services.”¹

The complete SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* document is available at this [link](#). In some cases, the College’s Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness|SACSCOC Liaison (APIE|SACSCOC Liaison) will need to communicate with a SACSCOC staff member to determine: 1) if a proposed modification represents substantive change and/or 2) whether notification, a prospectus, or prior approval is required from the College’s regional accreditor. If you are unable to access the link, please contact the College’s [APIE|SACSCOC Liaison](#).

1. Substantive changes, including those required by Federal regulation, include, but are not limited to, the following set of conceivable programs or proposals. Detailed information on these changes is available in [Appendices I, II, III, and IV](#) of this document.

- *Substantially changing the established mission or objectives of an institution or its programs.*

¹ SACSCOC. (2025.) *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*. <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf>.

- *Changing the legal status, form of control, or ownership of an institution.*
- *Changing the governance of an institution.*
- *Merging/consolidating two or more institutions or entities.*
- *Acquiring another institution, or any program, or location of another institution.*
- *Relocating an institution or an off-campus instructional site of an institution (including a branch campus).*
- *Offering courses or programs (i.e., credentials) at a higher or lower degree level than currently authorized.*
- *Adding graduate programs at an institution previously offering only undergraduate programs (including degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other for-credit credential).*
- *Changing the way an institution measures student progress, whether in clock hours or credit-hours; semesters, trimesters, or quarters; or time-based or non-time-based methods or measures.*
- *Adding a program that is a significant departure from the existing programs, or method of instructional delivery, from those offered when the institution was last evaluated for accreditation compliance.*
- *Initiating programs by distance education or correspondence courses.*
- *Adding an additional method of instructional delivery to a currently offered program e.g., face-to-face, distance, or competency.*
- *Entering into a cooperative academic arrangement.*
- *Entering into a written arrangement under [34 C.F.R. § 668.5 Written Arrangements to Provide Educational Programs](#) under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the title IV Higher Education Act (HEA) programs offers less than 25% (notification) or 25-50% (approval) of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs. An agreement offering more than 50% of one or more of an institution's programs is prohibited by Federal regulation.*
- *Substantially increasing or decreasing the number of clock or credit hours awarded or competencies demonstrated, or an increase in the level of credential awarded, for successful completion of one or more programs.*
- *Adding competency-based education programs.*
- *Adding competency-based program by direct assessment.*
- *Adding programs with completion pathways that recognize and accommodate a student's prior or existing knowledge or competency.*
- *Awarding dual or joint academic awards.*
- *Re-opening a previously closed program or off-campus instructional site.*
- *Adding a new off-campus instructional site/additional location including a branch campus.*
- *Adding a permanent location at a site at which an institution is conducting a teach-out program for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.*
- *Closing an institution, a program, a method of instructional delivery, an off-campus instructional site, or a program at an off-campus instructional site.*

2. Other substantive change requirements, including those required by Federal regulations, are as follows.

- *An institution is required to notify or secure SACSCOC approval prior to implementing a substantive change.*
- *An institution is responsible for maintaining compliance at all times with Standard 14.2 Substantive Change of the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation and with the SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy and Procedures and related policies, namely,*
 - [Advertising and Student Recruitment](#) [PDF];
 - [Credit Hours](#) [PDF];
 - [Direct Assessment Competency-based Educational Programs](#) [PDF];
 - [Distance and Correspondence Education](#) [PDF];
 - [Dual Enrollment](#) [PDF];
 - [Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status](#) [PDF];
 - and
 - [Request for a Period of Noncompliance](#) [PDF].

- An institution is required to have a written, published substantive change policy and procedure that is approved through institutional processes.
- Institutions are responsible for implementing and enforcing their substantive change policy and procedure.
- An institution's fiscal and administrative capability to operate off-campus instructional sites is assessed when a new site is reviewed for approval and as part of decennial and fifth-year interim reviews.
- New off-campus instructional sites are subject to a substantive change committee visit. A committee visit, when necessary, is authorized when a site is approved. The committee visit ensures the site has the personnel, facilities, and resources identified by an institution in its application or prospectus and ensures the quality of instructional and support services offered at the site.
- Different or additional requirements apply to an institution on **SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE RESTRICTION**. Restriction applies if an institution has been placed on Warning, Probation, or Probation for Good Cause over the prior three academic years, or if an institution is under provisional certification for participation in Federal financial aid programs.
- An institution is required to submit an institutional contingency teach-out plan to SACSCOC within 30 days of notification if the institution is placed or continued on Probation or Probation for Good Cause, or if the institution meets conditions enumerated in the procedures section of this policy originating from the USDoEd or state authority.
- Numerous Changes: Numerous substantive changes may accelerate an institution's next reaffirmation of accreditation. Accelerated reaffirmation may be triggered by, but not limited to,
 - a significant change in the number of off-campus instructional sites including branch campuses,
 - a significant change in the number of programs,
 - a significant change in enrollment, and
 - frequent mergers/consolidations or acquisitions.

III. Procedure or Application

General Guidelines.

1. Administrators, faculty, or staff from any division of the College developing proposals for new programs, or considering modifications to or closure of existing programs, must first follow the procedures described in College Policy [KI 1003 Creation and Revision of Academic, Non-Credit, and Collaborative Programs](#).

Note: In keeping with College Policy KI 1003, departments initiating a new program or making significant changes to an existing program, including program closure, are required to prepare a [VPAA|Provost Academic Program Information Sheet](#), detailed proposal, and all documentation requested by SACSCOC. The information sheet and detailed proposal usually include:

- a data-informed rationale and need statement for the program;
 - articulation of new program's alignment to College mission and strategic priorities;
 - complete program curriculum and new course descriptions;
 - a detailed description of required faculty, faculty availability, and faculty credentials;
 - a statement of expected student learning outcomes (SLOs) and a preliminary Demonstration of Learning (DoL) assessment plan;
 - a budget and/or outline of resources required;
 - verification of consultation with other College stakeholders – e.g., Olin Library, Facilities, appropriate Dean(s), Vice President(s), and/or President, and
 - verification of appropriate faculty and administrative governance approvals.
2. All initiatives that involve any consideration discussed in the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* statements above must be presented to the College's Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness|SACSCOC Liaison (APIE|SACSCOC Liaison) *as soon as* a draft proposal is prepared.
 3. The APIE|SACSCOC Liaison will determine, in consultation with senior leadership of the College, whether the proposed initiative requires additional institutional and/or external accreditor notification or approval, and ensure that Rollins is prepared to promptly communicate with accreditors as required.
 4. If a substantive change notification, or prospectus and accreditor approval is required, the sponsoring dean and/or program director is responsible for preparing documentation required. The sponsoring dean and program director

must meet with the APIE|SACSCOC Liaison to review reporting requirements and timelines, and collaborate with appropriate faculty, staff, and the APIE|SACSCOC Liaison to prepare documentation required.

5. The College's APIE|SACSCOC Liaison will notify all concerned parties when the appropriate notification or request for substantive change has been filed, coordinate any requests for additional information, and advise when approval is received.

Submission Deadlines.

The type of SACSCOC Board of Trustees review required, if any, and the intended implementation date for the substantive change determine deadlines for submission of a prospectus, application, or notification. [Appendices I, II, and III](#) provide details on the documentation and review required for common substantive changes.

*For substantive changes requiring approval by the SACSCOC full Board of Trustees, which meets biannually, **to be implemented after the date of the Board meeting**, the submission deadlines are:*

- March 15 for review at the Board's biannual meeting in June of the same calendar year, and
- September 1 for review at the Board's biannual meeting in December of the same calendar year.

For substantive changes requiring approval by the SACSCOC Executive Council of the Board of Trustees, which meets biweekly year-round, the submission deadlines are:

- January 1 for changes to be implemented July 1 through December 31 of the same calendar year, and
- July 1 for changes to be implemented January 1 through June 30 of the subsequent calendar year.

Substantive changes requiring notification only may submitted any time before implementation. Once the College has submitted notification, proposed changes may be implemented before receiving a response from SACSCOC.

For a substantive change to close a program, site, program at a site, or method of delivery, a teach-out plan should be submitted as soon as possible after the decision is made to close (i.e., stop admitting students).

For information on the next available deadlines for submission, please contact the APIE|SACSCOC Liaison or visit the [SACSCOC Substantive Change Upcoming Dates and Deadlines](#) webpage.

Implementation Time Limit.

Approved substantive changes must be implemented within two years of the SACSCOC approval date. If the College does not implement within two years of approval, then a new prospectus or application must be submitted and approved prior to implementation. An institution may request an implementation extension for cause, subject to SACSCOC Board of Trustees approval.

Review Fees and Committee Visit Expenses.

The following review fee and committee visit expenses, if required, are assessed by SACSCOC for review of a substantive changes. [Appendices I, II, and III](#) provide details on the level of review required for common substantive changes. Sponsoring Rollins schools, departments, or programs are responsible for payment of fees associated with substantive changes. The College's APIE|SACSCOC Liaison will coordinate payment of SACSCOC invoices as needed.

Review fee for substantive change prospectus or level change application \$500

Actual costs of each on-site committee visit including travel, lodging, Actual Cost
incidental fee for each reviewer, and related expenses

Administrative fee for each committee visit \$,2000

Substantive change fees for changes of ownership, mergers, consolidations, or acquisitions involving multiple institutions or entities, range from \$500 to \$7,500 per organization.

IV. Related Policies or Applicable Publications

[SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy and Procedures, Revised: December 2018; December 2020; March 2021](#)
[KI 1003 Creation and Revision of Academic, Non-Credit, and Collaborative Programs](#)

V. Effective Date

This policy is effective August 25, 2025, and supersedes all previously issued versions.

VI. Appendices/Supplemental Materials

- I. [Institutional Substantive Changes](#)
- II. [Programmatic Substantive Changes](#)
- III. [Off-Campus Instructional Site/Additional Location Substantive Changes](#)
- IV. [Terms Used by SACSCOC in the Substantive Change Process](#)

VII. Revision History

- Rev. 4: 8-25-25 regular review and to align with SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy revisions issued 12-21 to 6-25.
- Rev. 3: 9-13-21 to align with SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy revisions issued 6-21.
- Rev. 2: 4-15-21 to align to SACSCOC Substantive Change Policy revisions issued 12-18, 12-20, and 3-21.
- Rev. 1: 2-24-14 for final approval of KI 1003 *Creation and Revision of Academic, Non-Credit, and Collaborative Programs* and minor grammatical corrections.

Appendix I

Selected Institutional Substantive Changes

Developed from: Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). (2025). *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*, pp. 106-123. Retrieved from: <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf>.

Institutional substantive changes typically require submission of a prospectus and approval by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees prior to implementation by the institution.

Acquisition. (Six-months prior notification, prospectus, committee visit, and approval.) Acquisition is the sale, exchange, or transfer of a component of an institution to a SACSCOC-accredited institution. Post-acquisition, the institutions remain in operation as separate or entities. Acquisition includes off-campus instructional sites, for-credit educational programs, or other tangible educational assets. Acquisition excludes assets unrelated to the core mission of the SACSCOC institution, e.g., non-educational real estate and intangible property. Acquisition is independent of financial consideration; i.e., acquisitions may or may not involve exchange of money between entities. Implementation or effective date of the acquisition must occur within 30 days of SACSCOC approval. Acquisition normally does not affect the acquiring institution's reaffirmation cycle.

Change in Measure of Student Progress to Completion. (Prospectus and approval.) A change in the way an institution measures students' progress to completion requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. This includes changes from or to

- semester, trimester, or quarter academic calendars;
- time-based (i.e., calendar-based) or non-time based (i.e., competency-based) measures; and
- clock hour-based or credit hour-based measures.

This substantive change addresses an *institutional-level* change across most or all of an institution's programs. However, a *program-level* change in the measure of student progress may require notification or approval: see also program-level substantive changes such as clock-credit hour conversion, method of instructional delivery, and competency-based education programs.

Competency-based Education by Course/Credit-based Approach – Institutional-level Approval. (Prospectus and approval.) In a competency-based education (CBE) program using the course/credit-based approach, demonstrating competencies is embedded in a traditional curriculum with courses completed, credits earned, and credential awarded. Students typically enroll in an academic term and course credits are awarded at the end of the term by demonstrating mastery of the competencies associated with a course. Students may

accelerate learning and demonstration of competencies. Transcripts record courses and grades, though the institution may opt to maintain a separate transcript of competencies.

An institution's *first* program in which 50% or more of the program may be earned through the course/credit-based approach to CBE requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. This approves both the program and approves the institution to offer additional course/credit-based CBE programs subject to additional approvals or notifications described below.

Once approved to offer a first course/credit-based CBE program, additional programs in which 50% or more is earned through course/credit-based CBE are subject to:

- new program approval if it is a significant departure from the institution's existing programs,
—OR—
- new program notification if it is not a significant departure from the institution's existing programs,
—OR—
- notification as an additional method of instructional delivery for an existing program.

Distance Education – Institutional-level Approval.

(Prospectus and approval.) Distance education is a method of instructional delivery in which 50% or more of instruction occurs when students and instructors are not in the same location. It includes synchronous (live or real-time) and asynchronous (not live or real-time) instruction.

An institution's *first* program in which 50% or more of the program may be earned by distance education requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. This approves both the program and approves the institution to offer distance education programs subject to additional approvals or notifications described below.

After the institution is approved to offer its first distance education program, additional programs in which 50% or more is earned through distance education are subject to

- new program approval if it is a significant departure from the institution's existing programs,
—OR—

- new program notification if it is not a significant departure from the institution's existing programs, — OR—
- notification as an additional method of instructional delivery for an existing program.

Governance Change. (Six-months prior notification, prospectus, committee visit, and approval.) An institutional governance change requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. A governance change may include significantly altering governing board bylaws, the board's scope of authority or responsibility, the number of board members, or how board members are selected. Only changing the composition of the board — i.e., replacing current board members with new members or other changes in accordance with established bylaws — does not usually constitute a governance change. A substantive change committee visit is required and is authorized at the time of approval. A governance change may affect the institution's reaffirmation cycle.

Institution Closure. (Teach-out plan and approval.) An institution ending all instruction requires an institutional closure teach-out plan subject to SACSCOC Board of Trustees approval. Unlike an institutional contingency teach-out plan — which is a precautionary plan — an institutional closure addresses imminent closure or closure expected with reasonable certainty. The teach-out plan must be submitted as soon as possible after closure becomes known or expected. The teach-out plan details the institution's process for orderly closure with primary emphasis on assisting students complete their programs of study with minimal disruption and additional costs. Institutions may teach-out their own programs, enter into teach-out agreements with other institutions, or both. For an institution with a gradual or phased teach-out plan, the teach-out period may extend several years.

Institution Relocation. (Prospectus and approval.) An institution relocation requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. The prospectus should explain the institution's plan and timeline, assurance of continuous operation, assurance that instruction and student support services are not materially interrupted or hindered, and assurance of adequate financial resources and planning to support the relocation and continued operation of the institution. The prospectus must demonstrate the new location maintains the institution's compliance with Standards 13.7 *Physical Resources* and 13.8 *Institutional Environment*. The prospectus must demonstrate the relocation will not place the institution

in jeopardy of non-compliance with the *Principles of Accreditation*.

Institutional Contingency Teach-out Plan. (Teach-out plan and approval.) An institutional contingency teach-out plan must be approved if any of the following occur:

- a. the institution is placed or continued on probation or probation for good cause by SACSCOC,
- b. SACSCOC acts to end the institution's accreditation,
- c. the institution is on provisional certification for federal financial aid by USDoEd, and the institution has been directed by USDoEd to submit a teach-out plan as a condition of participation,
- d. the institution is on reimbursement for federal financial aid by USDoEd,
- e. the institution is on heightened cash monitoring for federal financial aid by USDoEd,
- f. the institution is the subject of USDoEd emergency action or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in federal financial aid, or
- g. the institution's state authorization is revoked.

A contingency teach-out plan is created in due diligence as a precaution rather than as an imminent closure plan. Should closure become necessary, the contingency teach-out plan becomes the institution's closure plan, subject to revisions as warranted. The objective of a contingency teach-out plan is assurance of adequate institutional planning and SACSCOC concurrence for the benefit of students, faculty, and staff well in advance of immediate need. The contingency teach-out plan must detail, for each institutional program, how the institution will provide options for students to complete their programs of study with minimal disruption and additional costs, including identification of comparable programs and institutions. Teach-out agreements may be included.

Level Authorization Addition. (Prospectus and approval.) Level authorization is required for an institution to offer instruction and credentials at a level lower than the highest level for which the institution is approved and for which the institution is not currently authorized. After an institution is authorized to offer instruction and credentials at a level, no further authorization is required to add additional instruction or credentials at that level. However, all other substantive change requirements apply without exception to subsequent programs at that level.

Level Authorization Removal. (Notification and approval.) A Level Authorization Removal notification is required after an institution ends all instruction and programs at a given instructional or credential level yet

continues to offer instruction or credentials at its current level classification, i.e., the highest level for which it is approved to offer instruction or credentials. The institution's level classification is unchanged, yet its authorization to offer instruction or credentials at the level for which all instruction and programs have ended is removed.

Level Change to a Higher Level. (Prospectus and approval.) A level change to a higher level represents a significant change in the scope of an institution that has far-reaching implications including new and different institutional effectiveness obligations, resources (including faculty sufficiency and qualifications, financial, and library and learning/information), services (information technology, recruiting and admission, student support, e.g.) and more. Approval of a level change to a higher level includes approval of the first program or programs to be offered at the higher level. As such, the prospectus must separately address new program approval requirements for each program at the proposed higher level to be offered in the first year of implementation after approval.

A substantive change committee visit is required after the implementation of a level change to a higher level. The visit generally occurs no more than six months after implementation of the new program(s) at the newly-approved level. An institution may not implement additional programs at the newly approved level classification until after the SACSCOC Board of Trustees takes positive action on the report of the level change substantive change committee visit at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board (typically in June and December).

Level Change to a Lower Level. (Notification and Approval.) A Level Change to a Lower Level notification is required after an institution ends all instruction and programs at its current level classification, i.e., the highest level for which it is approved to offer instruction or credentials. The institution's level classification is lowered to the highest level at which it currently offers instruction or credentials. Its authorization to offer instruction or credentials at levels lower than its level classification is unchanged. A Level Change to a Lower Level notification is submitted after the institution has secured Program Closure approval(s) and after all instruction and programs have ended. Program Closures (teach-outs) cannot be bundled and submitted with a Level Change to a Lower Level notification (nor vice versa).

Merger/Consolidation. (Six-months prior notification, prospectus, committee visit, and approval.)

Merger/consolidation is the sale, exchange, or transfer of all assets of at least one institution/entity to a SACSCOC-accredited institution. Following a merger/consolidation, only one institution remains in operation.

Merger/consolidation is independent of financial consideration; i.e., a merger/consolidation may or may not involve the exchange of money. Refer to [Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status](#) [PDF] policy for additional guidance.

Mission Change. (Prospectus and approval.) A significant change in the established mission of an institution requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. A mission change fundamentally alters the character of an institution and its portfolio of academic programs or other mission-driven activities.

- An editorial change or re-wording of a mission statement that does not reflect a material change in mission is not a substantive change. This type of change does not require approval and should not be reported to SACSCOC.
- A mission change may be implicitly embedded or concurrent with other another type of substantive change requiring SACSCOC approval. Examples are a level change, a merger/consolidation, or establishing a program or portfolio of programs that changes the distinctiveness of an institution. This type of mission change typically does not require separate review and approval but should be clear in the prospectus or application for the other type of substantive change.

Ownership, Means of Control, or Legal Status Change. (Six-months prior notification, prospectus, committee visit, and approval.) An institutional change of ownership, change of institutional means of control, or change of institutional legal status requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. A substantive change committee visit is required and is authorized at the time of approval. A change of ownership normally affects the institution's reaffirmation cycle. A change of the means of control or change of legal status may affect the institution's reaffirmation cycle. Refer to [Merger/Consolidation, Acquisition, Change of Ownership, and Change of Governance, Control, Form, or Legal Status](#) [PDF] policy for additional guidance including the approval process, prospectus requirements, and submission deadlines.

Appendix II

Grammatical Substantive Changes

Developed from: Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). (2025). *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*, pp. 124-135. Retrieved from: <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf>.

Grammatical substantive changes typically require SACSCOC notification prior to implementation by the institution. In some cases, submission of a prospectus and approval by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees are required.

Clock-Credit Hour Conversion. (Prospectus and approval.) Changing a program's progress to completion measure from clock hours to credit hours – or from credit hours to clock hours – requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. A conversion must be based on a sound academic rationale and an objective conversion formula demonstrating parity between the current and proposed measures. A conversion must demonstrate no negative impact on student learning outcomes or students' expected time to completion, and must demonstrate compliance with SACSCOC standards and policies and the institution's policies.

Competency-based Education by Direct Assessment – Approval. (Prospectus, committee visit, and approval.) A program in which 50% or more of the program may be earned through the direct assessment approach to competency-based education (CBE) requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. Each direct assessment CBE program requires SACSCOC approval, independent of prior direct assessment program approvals for the institution. A new direct assessment program is subject to determination of significant departure and, as warranted, approved as a new program concurrent with the direct assessment approval prior to implementation. Approval by the full SACSCOC Board of Trustees is required. See also [Direct Assessment Competency-based Educational Programs](#) policy [PDF].

Competency-based Education by Direct Assessment – Notification. (Notification.) A program in which 25-49% of the program may be earned through the direct-assessment approach to competency-based education (CBE) requires SACSCOC notification prior to implementation. A new direct assessment program is subject to determination of significant departure and, as warranted, approved as a new program concurrent with the direct assessment notification prior to implementation. See also [Direct Assessment Competency-based Educational Programs](#) policy [PDF].

Cooperative Academic Arrangement with Title IV Entities. (Notification.) An agreement with a title IV entity (or entities) to deliver program content with credit being recorded on the SACSCOC institution's transcript as its own requires notification prior to implementation if

- 50% or more of a program is offered through the arrangement — OR —
- the SACSCOC institution could not deliver the program without the arrangement, i.e., it is dependent on the arrangement to deliver a program.

Unless at least one of the above criteria is met and the institution transcribes the credit as its own, the arrangement with a title IV entity is not a substantive change requiring notification and nothing should be submitted to SACSCOC. If either criterion is met, notification is required and must include a copy of an agreement signed by the institution and the Title IV entity. Examples of a cooperative academic arrangement include geographic or denominational consortia, statewide distance education agreements, and contractual instruction. Also refer to Standard 10.9 *Cooperative Academic Arrangements of the Principles of Accreditation*.

Cooperative Academic Arrangement with Non-Title IV Entities – Approval. (Prospectus and approval.) An agreement with an entity (or entities) not certified to participate in U.S. Department of Education (USDE) Title IV programs to deliver 25-50% of a program's content recorded on the SACSCOC institution's transcript as its own requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. A prospectus must include the program(s) involved, names and contact information of the principal responsible parties at the institution and participating entity (or entities), and a copy of a signed agreement with the entity (or entities). SACSCOC is obligated to respond within 90 days of receipt of the notification. Also refer to Standard 10.9 *Cooperative Academic Arrangements of the Principles of Accreditation*.

Cooperative Academic Arrangement with Non-Title IV Entities – Notification. (Notification.) An agreement with an entity (or entities) not certified to participate in USDE Title IV programs to deliver less than 25% of a program's content recorded on the SACSCOC institution's transcript as its own requires notification prior to implementation. SACSCOC is obligated to respond within 90 days of receipt of the notification. Also refer to Standard 10.9 *Cooperative Academic Arrangements of the Principles of Accreditation*.

Correspondence Education. Correspondence education is a learning process in which the institution provides instructional materials and examination, by mail or electronic transmission, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Courses are typically self-paced at the student's discretion. Distance education requirements equally apply to correspondence education. Please refer to the SACSCOC [Distance and Correspondence Education](#) policy [PDF].

Dual Academic Award. (Notification.) An arrangement in which a student receives instruction at two (or more) institutions in prescribed curricula leading to each institution granting academic awards at the same credential level. The award granted by each institution bears only its name. A new program offered as part of a dual academic award is subject to determination of the percentage of new content and, as warranted, notification or approval as described in the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*. For additional information, refer to SACSCOC [Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards](#) policy [PDF].

The following do not qualify as dual academic awards and thus do not require notification.

- completion or pathway options across credential levels (e.g., a pathway leading to the award of a baccalaureate degree and a master's degree),
- agreements addressing transfer articulation only, and
- agreements for individual students such as cotutelle arrangements that do not meet dual academic award criteria.

Joint Academic Awards with non-SACSCOC Institution(s) or Entity(ies). (Prospectus and approval.) A student receives instruction at two (or more) institutions, where at least one is a non-SACSCOC institution or entity, in prescribed curricula leading to the institutions granting a single academic award bearing the names, seals, and

officials' signatures of each participating institution. For additional information, refer to the SACSCOC [Agreements Involving Joint and Dual Academic Awards](#) policy [PDF].

Joint Academic Award with SACSCOC Institution(s). (Notification.) Joint academic awards are those in which a student receives instruction at two or more institutions in a prescribed curriculum leading to the institutions granting a single academic award bearing the names, seals, and officials' signatures of each participating institution. Although a joint academic award's roles and tasks may be parsed across participating institutions and articulated in an agreement, program responsibility is not severable across institutions. Each institution is responsible for all aspects of a joint academic award, including responsibility for faculty qualifications and sufficiency, student support services, student learning outcomes, and others. Even though institutions may share the work, they cannot delegate overall responsibility. Each participating institution must submit notification. (If at least one institution is not accredited by SACSCOC, approval is required; see also Joint Academic Award with non-SACSCOC Institution(s) or Entity(ies).)

Method of Instructional Delivery. (Notification.) Adding a method of instructional delivery to an existing program requires notification prior to implementation. A specific method of instructional delivery applies when 50% or more of a program is delivered by that method. A program may be delivered 50% or more by more than one method (students may have the option to choose from different methods of instructional delivery for the same program, e.g., predominately face-to-face versus predominately distance). The three methods of instructional delivery are competency-based education, distance education, and face-to-face instruction. For example, adding a distance education instructional delivery mode to an existing program delivered face-to-face requires notification.

Adding some methods of instructional delivery may require approval as a separate type of substantive change: direct assessment competency-based education delivery if 50% or more of the program can be earned by direct assessment; course/credit-based competency-based education delivery of a program if 50% or more of the program can be earned by course/credit-based competency-based education *and* if the institution has not been previously approved to offer 50% or more of a program by course/credit-based competency-based education; and distance education delivery of a program

if 50% or more of the program can be earned by distance education *and* the institution has not been previously approved to offer 50% or more of a program by distance education.

New Program – Approval. (*Prospectus and approval.*)

A new program with 50-100% new content is a significant departure from the institution's existing programs and requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. Content is new if not currently offered by the institution at the new program's instructional level (baccalaureate, master's, specialist, or doctoral).

- A determination of the percentage of new content is made by the institution, not SACSCOC.
- New program approval equally applies to a degree, diploma, certificate, or other for-credit credentials.
- If the institution is not currently approved to offer courses or programs at the new program's instructional level, a level change approval is required.
- Increasing a program's level, i.e., offering a new program at a higher instructional level than currently offered, is by definition a significant departure, e.g., if an institution offers a bachelor's program in a discipline and begins a new program in the same discipline at the master's level, the new program is a significant departure and requires approval prior to implementation.

New Program – Notification. (*Notification.*) A new program with 25-49% new content is a significant departure from the institution's existing programs and requires notification prior to implementation.

- Content is new if it is not currently offered by the institution at the new program's instructional level (associate, baccalaureate, master's, education specialist, or doctoral).
- A determination of the percentage of new content is made by the institution, not SACSCOC.
- New program notification equally applies to a degree, diploma, certificate, or other for-credit credential.
- If the institution is not currently approved to offer courses or programs at the new program's instructional level, a level change approval is required (e.g., the institution's first courses or programs at the baccalaureate degree level).

Program Closure. (*Teach-out plan and approval.*) Closing a program requires SACSCOC approval; SACSCOC approval requires a teach-out plan. Closure is defined as closed to admission or entry, not the cessation of instruction; i.e., closure date is when students can no longer start, not the date instruction ends.

Closure approval ensures the institution has a plan and process to provide students with reasonable completion options that minimize disruption and additional costs. Because closure approval is approval of the teach-out process, not the closure per se (i.e., not after the fact), a teach-out plan should be submitted as soon as possible after the decision is made to close.

Program closure includes ending a program at all locations or by all methods of instructional delivery, but also includes ending a student's completion option at a specific location or by a specific method of instructional delivery. Therefore, program closure approval is required if a program closes

- at a location (on-campus or off-campus instructional site) but continues to be offered at other locations, or
- by a method of instructional delivery, but continues to be offered by other methods of instructional delivery.

Program closure is not required for a specialization embedded *within* a discipline-specific program; a minor, concentration, cognate, or other similar term depending on institutional terminology.

Because time is of the essence – to provide students with maximum time to consider and adapt to alternate completion plans – institutions a program teach-out plans may generally begin after a plan for such has been submitted to SACSCOC for approval.

Program Designed for Prior Learning – Approval.

(*Prospectus and approval.*) Initiating a program requiring students to possess prior learning as a condition of admission requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation only if the proposed degree program does not meet the program length requirement of the *Principles of Accreditation* Standard 9.2 *Program Length*.

Program Designed for Prior Learning – Notification.

(*Notification.*) Initiating a program requiring students to possess prior learning as a condition of admission requires notification prior to implementation. *Principles of Accreditation* Standard 10.7 *Policies for Awarding Credit* applies without exception to programs designed for prior learning. A new program designed for prior learning is subject to notification or approval as a new program as defined in the SACSCOC *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures* document. A proposed degree program that does not meet the program length requirement of the *Principles of Accreditation* Standard 9.2 *Program Length* must be submitted as a New Program – Approval prospectus.

Program Length Change. (Prospectus and approval.) An increase or decrease in program length requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation if program credit hours (or equivalent) change by 25% or more AND students' expected time to completion increases or decreases by more than one term (or equivalent).

This requirement equally applies to degree, diploma, certificate, or other for-credit credentials.

Program Re-Open. (Notification.) Closed programs may be re-opened within five years of closure date by submitting a notification. Closure date is the date the program closed admissions, not the last date of instruction or SACSCOC approval date . If more than five

years have elapsed, the program is subject to new program notification or approval.

If a closed program resulted in an institutional obligation to seek either Level Authorization Removal approval or Level Change to a Lower Level approval, then the program is not eligible to be re-opened. That is, if an institution closed its final program at an instructional or credential level – associate, baccalaureate, masters, specialist, or doctoral – then that program is ineligible to be re-opened and the institution is obligated to seek Level Change Addition approval or Level Change to a Higher Level approval for the program as defined in this policy.

Appendix III

Off-Campus Instructional Site/Additional Location Substantive Changes

Developed from: Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). (2025). *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*, pp. 136-140. Retrieved from: <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf>.

Substantive changes involving off-campus instructional site(s) and/or additional location(s) typically require SACSCOC notification prior to implementation by the institution. In some cases, submission of a prospectus and approval by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees are required.

Off-campus Instructional Site Notification. (Notification.)

An off-campus instructional site at which 25-49% of a program's instruction is delivered requires notification prior to implementation. Instruction at a site may cross the 25% notification threshold any time after the institution submits notification; the institution does not have to wait for a SACSCOC response to implement (note this applies to site notification only, not to site approval).

Off-campus Instructional Site Approval (Including Branch Campus). (Prospectus, possible committee visit, and approval.) An off-campus instructional site at which 50% or more of a program's instruction is delivered requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. An off-campus instructional site may qualify as a branch campus. Before submitting a prospectus for approval of a branch campus, ensure – and demonstrate in the prospectus – *all* branch campus criteria are met. A site name may not include “branch” or “branch campus” unless approved as a branch campus as defined in policy. The Commission provides multiple means of approval, see the SACSCOC [Substantive Change Policy and Procedures](#), pp. 74-79.

Off-campus Instructional Site Relocation – Non-branch Campus. (Notification.) Relocating an off-campus instructional site that is not a branch campus requires notification prior to implementation. This equally applies to notified sites and to approved sites.

Off-campus Instructional Site Relocation – Branch Campus. (Prospectus and approval.) Relocating an off-campus instructional site that is a branch campus requires SACSCOC approval prior to implementation. A prospectus is required.

Off-campus Instructional Site Name or Address Change. (Notification.) Changing the name or address of an off-campus instructional site requires notification prior to implementation.

Off-campus Instructional Site Closure. (Teach-out plan and approval.)

Closing an off-campus instructional site requires SACSCOC approval. Closure approval equally applies to notified sites and approved sites. All closure approvals require an acceptable teach-out plan. For SACSCOC, a site is considered closed as of the date the institution stops admitting students to the site; closure *is not* the date of last instruction.

Off-campus Instructional Site Re-open. (Notification.) An off-campus instructional site previously approved for closure may be re-opened within five years of the closure date by submitting notification. The closure date is the date the site was closed to admission, not the date of last instruction or the date SACSCOC approved the closure. If more than five years have elapsed, the site is subject to notification or approval as a new site. The name of a site may be changed concurrent with its re-opening, but the address of a site when re-opened must be the same as the address on record when the site was approved for closure.

Appendix IV

Terms Used by SACSCOC in the Substantive Change Process

Developed from: Southern Association of College and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). (2025). *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*, pp. 142-144. Retrieved from: <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2019/08/SubstantiveChange.pdf>.

Acquisition. The sale, exchange, or transfer of a component of an institution's or entity's assets to a SACSCOC accredited institution. (*See also merger/consolidation.*)

Additional location. *See off-campus instructional site/additional location.*

Approval. Official action by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees enabling an institution to implement a proposed substantive change. Institutions secure approval by submitting a substantive change prospectus or application subject to review by the Board of Trustees.

Branch campus. Off-campus instruction site/location geographically apart from an institution's main campus, where instruction is delivered, and is independent of the main campus of an institution. An off-campus instructional site is independent of the main campus if it: is permanent; offers courses in educational programs leading to a degree, diploma, certificate, or other for-credit credential; has its own faculty and administrative or supervisory organization; and has its own budgetary and hiring authority.

Closure. The ending of instruction:

- in an educational program,
- at off-campus instructional site,
- in an educational program at an off-campus instructional site or main campus,
- by a method of instructional delivery, or
- at an entire institution
- such that a student cannot complete their program of study as planned.

(*See also teach-out agreement and teach-out plan.*)

Competency-based education. A method of instructional delivery in which competencies are learned through interaction with faculty and an academic credential is earned based on what students demonstrate they can do. A competency is a well-defined statement of what a person can do as a result of learning. Progression and completion are measured by demonstrated attainment of competencies. (*See also competency-based education by course/credit-based approach, competency-based education by direct assessment, and method of instructional delivery.*)

Competency-based education by course/credit-based approach. Demonstrating competencies is embedded in a traditional curriculum with courses completed, credits earned, and a credential awarded. Students typically enroll in an academic term and course credits are awarded at the end of the term by demonstrating mastery of the competencies associated with a course. Students may accelerate learning through demonstration of competencies. Transcripts record courses and grades, though the institution may opt to maintain a separate transcript of competencies.

Competency-based education by direct assessment.

Progression and completion of a program is based solely on demonstrating mastery of prescribed competencies. There are no academic terms (i.e., calendars), courses, or credit hours. Students progress through a program's competencies at their own pace within limits, if any, established by the institution. The academic transcript consists of successfully demonstrated competencies and the level of mastery attained.

Cooperative academic arrangement. An agreement between a SACSCOC-accredited institution and another entity (or entities) to deliver program content recorded on the SACSCOC institution's transcript as its own (see also Standard 10.9 *Cooperative Academic Arrangements* of the *Principles of Accreditation*). Examples include geographic or denominational consortia, statewide distance education agreements, collaborative agreements with international institutions, and contractual instruction.

Correspondence courses. Courses in which students and instructors are not in the same locations and in which instructional materials and learning assessments (such as examinations, assignments, creative works, etc.) are delivered electronically or by mail. Interaction between instructor and student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student. Courses are usually self-paced within limits.

Direct Assessment. *See competency-based education by direct assessment.*

Distance education/distance learning. A method of instructional delivery in which 50% or more of instruction occurs when students and instructors are not in the same location. It includes synchronous (live or in real-time) and asynchronous (not live or in real-time) instruction. (*See also method of instructional delivery.*)

Dual academic award. A student receives instruction at two (or more) institutions in prescribed curricula leading to each institution granting academic awards at the same credential level. (*See also joint academic award.*)

Educational program. *See program.*

Face-to-face instruction. A method of instructional delivery in which 50% or more of instruction occurs when students and instructors are in the same location. (*See also method of instructional delivery.*)

Federal regulations. Rules and regulations of the U.S. Department of Education (USDoEd) as codified in the Code of Federal Regulation (C.F.R.) including but not limited to 34 C.F.R. § 600, 602, 603, 654, 668, and 674 (*Federal Register*, Vol. 84, No. 212, November 1, 2019/Rules and Regulations; pp. 58834-58933), viz., § 600.2 (definitions), § 602.22 (substantive changes and other reporting requirements), and § 602.24 (additional procedures certain institutional agencies must have).

Geographically apart (or geographically separate). Non-contiguous locations independent of distance. (*See also off-campus instructional site/additional location and branch campus.*)

Instructional level. For courses and programs, the level of content and rigor corresponding to traditional academic degree levels: associate, baccalaureate, master's, education specialist, or doctoral.

Joint academic award. A student receives instruction at two (or more) institutions in prescribed curricula leading to the institutions granting a single academic award bearing the names, seals, and officials' signatures of each participating institution. (*See also dual academic award.*)

Level authorization. SACSCOC authorization for an institution to offer instruction and credentials at a level lower than the highest level for which an institution is approved to offer instruction and credentials.

Level classification. An institutional status indicating the highest level for which an institution is approved to offer instruction and credentials.

Merger/consolidation. The sale, exchange, or transfer of all assets of at least one institution or entity to a SACSCOC accredited institution. Following a merger/consolidation, only one institution remains in operation as a separate institution or entity. (*See also acquisition.*)

Method of delivery. The principal method by which instruction is delivered to include:

- competency-based education (all forms),
- distance education, and
- face-to-face instruction.

Notification. An official communication from an institution to SACSCOC as defined in *Substantive Change Policy and Procedures*. A notification is complete only when accepted by SACSCOC upon satisfactory review by staff. (*See also approval.*)

Off-campus instructional site/additional location. A location geographically apart from an institution's sole main campus and where instruction is delivered. An off-campus instructional site may qualify as a branch campus. (*See also branch campus.*)

Prior learning. Non-credentialed learning through life or work experience for which an institution will award academic credit by assessment of the prior learning and/or allow the prior learning to satisfy the requirements for completing a for-credit credential.

Program. A coherent course of study leading to a for-credit credential including a degree, diploma, certificate, or other generally recognized credential. *Exception:* General education, for substantive change purposes, is usually considered a program even if a credential is not awarded. See also Standard 8.2.b *Student Outcomes: General Education* and Standard 9.3 *General Education Requirements* of the *Principles of Accreditation*.

Substantive Change Restriction. Additional or different requirements for institutions meeting defined criteria. The criteria are defined in this policy, and the additional or different requirements are identified for each substantive change type. These restrictions and the criteria for which institutions are affected are required by federal regulations.

Teach-out. The process and time period of a teach-out plan. (*See also closure, teach-out agreement, and teach-out plan.*)

Teach-out plan. Written plan developed by an institution allowing students to complete programs of study due to closure of a program, off-campus instructional site, method of instructional delivery, or to close the institution. A teach-out plan provides for orderly process, equitable treatment of students, minimal disruption and additional costs to students, and covers all enrolled students regardless of their progress to completion. *(See also closure, teach-out, and teach-out agreement.)*

Teach-out agreement. An optional written agreement with an institution or entity under which students covered by a teach-out plan may complete their programs of study. A teach-out agreement may include student eligibility criteria, time limits, fee waivers, tuition parity, or other negotiated terms. *(See also closure, teach-out, and teach-out plan.)*